

CAMPUS NEWS

Gardner-Webb Officials Announce Speaker for 2023 Commencement Ceremony

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Sharon Decker, Former N.C. Secretary of Commerce, will Address Graduates

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—Business executive and former N.C. Secretary of Commerce, Sharon Decker, will be the guest speaker for the Spring 2023 Commencement program at Gardner-Webb University. The traditional ceremony will take place on Thursday, May 4, at 7 p.m. in Spangler Stadium.

Decker is the president of Carolina Operations, Tryon Equestrian Partners in Mill Spring, N.C. She started her career at Duke Energy Corp. in 1979, and during her 17-year career there, she made history by becoming the company's youngest and first female vice president. Decker is also a wife and mother of five, and a Presbyterian lay leader.



▲ Sharon Decker

“We are honored that Sharon Decker will join us to provide words of encouragement and motivation as GWU proudly sends its graduates out into the world,” shared Gardner-Webb President Dr. William Downs. “Mrs. Decker has compiled an impressive record in business and industry, she has served the citizens of our state in important leadership roles, and she has made an indelible impact on North Carolina’s efforts to expand job opportunities. I’m eager to hear her message, which is sure to be both timely and of great relevance to all those poised to enter the workforce.”

The Deckers have a long history with Gardner-Webb. Her husband, Bob, is a 1975 alumnus, and she has studied in the School of Divinity. Her father-in-law, the late Robert Decker, was recognized as a GWU professor emeritus of music.

Decker came to Tryon in 2015 as chief operating officer and vice president. She was named president in 2020. The 1,600-acre property has 14 fully-engineered competition rings, an indoor complex that seats 5,000, more than 1,400 permanent stalls, diverse onsite restaurants, shopping and onsite lodging. The center hosted the 2018 World Equestrian Games, which was the largest sporting event in the United States that year.

Prior to Tryon, Decker was appointed Secretary of Commerce by Gov. Pat McCrory and served in that capacity for two years. She founded The Tapestry Group, which focused on encouraging individuals to grow spiritually deeper and physically, mentally and emotionally healthier. She also served as the President of Tanner Companies, was the founding President of the Lynwood Foundation and has served as chair of the Charlotte Chamber. Decker graduated cum laude from UNC-Greensboro with a bachelor’s degree in home economics and consumer services.

After the traditional ceremony on May 4, graduates will be honored in separate recognition services on May 5. The schedule follows:

- College of Health Sciences, Lutz-Yelton Convocation Center, 9 a.m.
- Godbold College of Business, Spangler Stadium, 9 a.m.

- School of Divinity, 10 a.m., Dover Chapel
- College of Education, Lutz-Yelton Convocation Center, 10:30 a.m.
- College of Arts & Sciences, Spangler Stadium, 10:30 a.m.

Auxiliary aids will be made available to persons with disabilities upon request 10 working days prior to the event. Please call 704-406-4270 or email disabilityservices@gardner-webb.edu with your request.

Gardner-Webb University is North Carolina's recognized leader in private, Christian higher education. A Carnegie-Classified Doctoral/Professional University, GWU is home to nine colleges and schools, more than 80 undergraduate and graduate majors, and a world-class faculty. Located on a beautiful 225-acre campus in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb prepares graduates to impact their chosen professions, equips them with the skills to advance the frontiers of knowledge, and inspires them to make a positive and lasting difference in the lives of others. Ignite your future at [Gardner-Webb.edu](https://gardner-webb.edu/) (<https://gardner-webb.edu/>).